



OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

REACH TEACH ENCOURAGE DISCIPLE



FEBRUARY 2018

**CONTROVERSIES INVOLVING
BIBLICAL AND JEWISH HOLIDAYS
AS A MESSIANIC BELIEVER**



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STATEMENT OF BELIEF

*Outreach Israel Ministries
and Messianic Apologetics*

There is One Almighty Creator God of the Universe, who has revealed Himself to us in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures and is fully God. It is mandatory for us to believe in a Divine Redeemer to be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who receive Messiah Yeshua into their lives and confess of their sins. Those who reject Messiah will be consigned to eternal punishment.

The Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired, infallible Word of God as revealed in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.

There is only one assembly of chosen ones/elect, the congregation of Israel, of which all Believers in Messiah are a part. God does not have two groups of elect: Israel and "the Church."

The Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) is the foundation of all Scripture, was followed by our Messiah Yeshua, and is to still be followed and studied by Believers today.

Yeshua the Messiah is coming to gather the saints after the Tribulation period.

OIM is an *agapē* ministry, freely and benevolently giving the vast majority of its teachings and resources, without charge, to those who desire to be spiritually nourished.

For a fuller Statement of Faith, consult the OIM website

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OIM UPDATE

February 2018

At the conclusion of this month on the 14th of Adar (February 28th), the worldwide Jewish and Messianic Jewish communities will be observing the Feast of *Purim* (Esther 9:26-32). The Book of Esther is typically read or reflected upon through plays or skits, and the reader of the *megillah* or scroll of Esther discovers how one wicked person, Haman, was almost able—except for the providential protection of the Almighty One—to annihilate the Jewish population of the Persian Empire. How could this near tragedy occur, you might ask? As I reflected upon that possibility, in light of what has been transpiring in the United States government in recent years, I saw some distinct parallels.

First, I was reminded of how the “evil tongue” or *lashon hara* (slander, lies, mis-truths, etc.) was effectively used to incite the possible murder of untold thousands of Jewish souls, by one anti-Semitic individual placed high in Persian government circles. In the following passage, because Mordecai the Jew would not bow down to Haman, Haman cleverly convinced Persian King Ahasuerus that all of the Jews must be destroyed because they “did not observe the king’s laws.” Clearly in his lust for power, Haman twisted the truth, as he over-zealously concluded that everyone must pay homage and bow to him:

“Day after day, they spoke to him but he would not listen to them. Therefore they told Haman in order to see whether Mordecai’s resolve would prevail, for he had told them that he was a Jew. **When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down or paying him honor, Haman was filled with rage. But it was repugnant in his eyes to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him the identity of Mordecai’s people. So Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.** In the first month (that is the month of Nisan), in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast the pur (that is, ‘the lot’) in the presence of Haman from day to day and month to month, up to the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. **Haman then said to King Ahasuerus: ‘There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose laws differ from those of every other people and who do not obey the king’s laws. It is not in the king’s interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let an edict be written to destroy them. I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who carry out this business, to put it into the king’s treasuries.’** The king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman—son of Hammedatha the Agagite—**enemy of the Jews.** The king said to Haman, “The silver and the people are yours—do with them as you please” (Esther 3:4-11, TLV).

Secondly, I was reminded in the concluding words of the *B’shalach* Torah portion (Exodus 13:17-17:16) that Israel will continually struggle with the physical, and apparently also, spiritual descendants, of Amalek, from generation to generation:

“So Joshua overpowered the Amalekites and his army with the edge of the sword. *ADONAI* said to Moses, ‘Write this for a memorial in the book, and rehearse it in the hearing of Joshua, for I will utterly blot out the memory of the Amalekites from under heaven.’ Then Moses built an altar, and called the name of it *ADONAI-Nissi*. Then he said, **‘By the hand upon the throne of *ADONAI*, *ADONAI* will have war with Amalek**

from generation to generation” (Exodus 17:13-16, TLV).

This memory took me to 1 Samuel 15, where the graphic description of King Saul’s defeat of the Amalekites is chronicled. But lamentably, Saul does not immediately execute Agag, the king of the Amalekites, but spared him until the Prophet Samuel arrived on the scene. In the following selected passages, the consequences of disobedience are recorded:

“Then Saul struck down the Amalekites from Havilah until you come to Shur, which is close to Egypt. He captured King Agag of Amalek alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. **But Saul and the people spared Agag** as well as the best of the sheep, the cattle, even the fatlings and the lambs, and all that was good, since they were not willing to utterly destroy them; everything that was worthless and feeble, they destroyed completely” (1 Samuel 15:7-9, TLV).

“‘But I did obey the voice of *ADONAI*,’ Saul said to Samuel. ‘I went on the mission on which *ADONAI* sent me, and brought back Agag the king of Amalek—and utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen—the best of what was under the ban of destruction—to sacrifice to *ADONAI* your God in Gilgal.’ **Samuel said: ‘Does *ADONAI* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of *ADONAI*? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry. Since you have rejected *ADONAI*’s word, He has also rejected you as king”** (1 Samuel 15:20-23, TLV).

“Then Samuel said, ‘Bring me Agag the king of Amalek.’ Agag approached him in chains, thinking, ‘Surely bitter death has turned back.’ Then Samuel said, ‘As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women.’ **Then Samuel cut Agag into pieces before *ADONAI* in Gilgal”** (1 Samuel 15:32-33, TLV).

The result of this encounter was not only Saul losing his kingship, but the Jewish Sages have widely concluded that during Agag’s brief reprieve from death, he had relations with a woman who was a direct ancestor of the aforementioned Haman. Hence, Saul’s lack of obedience perpetuated further physical, and I might add, spiritual troubles, upon the Jewish people down through the centuries.

In addition, by recalling God’s instructions to blot out the memory of the Amalekites, every time the name of Haman is mentioned during annual *Purim* plays, the audience hisses, boos, or uses noisemakers to derisively mock this wicked enemy of the Jews:

“Remember what Amalek did to you along the way as you came out from Egypt—how he happened upon you along the way and **attacked those among you in the**



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rear, all the stragglers behind you, when you were tired and weary—he did not fear God. Now when *ADONAI* your God grants you rest from all the enemies surrounding you in the land *ADONAI* your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, you are to blot out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget!” (Deuteronomy 25:17-19, TLV).

So how do the recollections, of these ancient words and the existence of the spirit of Amalek, apply to today’s challenges in the American government? Obviously, the Apostolic Writings give Believers more insight into the invisible spiritual warfare which has been persistent from the very Garden of Eden, as noted in these statements of the Apostle Paul:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you are able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the worldly forces of this darkness, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places**” (Ephesians 6:10-12, TLV).

Here Paul describes the invisible, yet discernible schemes of the Devil, which are being orchestrated by “the angelic Rulers, the angelic Authorities, the potentates of the dark present, the spirit-forces of evil in the heavenly sphere” (Moffat New Testament). When one breaks down these four distinct entities, it is abundantly clear that Satan, the enemy of our souls—coupled with the world and the flesh—is a worthy adversary. But Paul earlier has also described the prince of the power of air, who is working through vessels of disobedience, to thwart God’s chosen with lies and distortions through the very airwaves used for communication:

“You were dead in your trespasses and sins. At that time, you walked in the way of this world, **in conformity to the ruler of the domain of the air—the ruler of the spirit who is now operating in the sons of disobedience**. We too all lived among them in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind. By nature we were children of wrath, just like the others” (Ephesians 2:1-3, TLV).

It is my contention that the Evil One is using willing accomplices in the various media outlets to spread lies, slander, and misinformation about certain people in leadership using the technological tools currently available. The distortions of character and the blatant lies are difficult to hear over and over. Certain media outlets are making false statements and claims, which are obviously coordinated, because they use the same phrases and words in what has been labeled a “mockingbird” pattern.

So brothers and sisters here is a warning! The same spirit of Amalek (an agent of HaSatan) which attempted to destroy the Jewish people in ancient times, **is still seeking to rob, steal, and destroy whomever it can**. It seeks to control through perverting the truth. It is alive and well on Planet Earth, circling in the airwaves, desiring to distort justice and create confusion and mistrust wherever it can. So with all this in mind, it is highly recommended that we all pray—like in the days of Esther—and ask for discernment regarding what we hear and see from the multitude of powers and forces that are working constantly to gain our attention, and if possible, our allegiance. We do indeed need to put on the armor of God in order to ward off the wiles of the Devil (Ephesians 6:10-20). May the Holy One of Israel have mercy on each of us, our families, friends, and most especially the Body of Messiah in these trying days!

Chag Samaech Purim! Mark Huey

CONTROVERSIES INVOLVING BIBLICAL AND JEWISH HOLIDAYS AS A MESSIANIC BELIEVER

by J.K. McKee

For people throughout the broad Messianic movement, the appointed times or *moedim* of the Torah, and the various traditional Jewish holidays and commemorations, are significant moments of celebration, enrichment, and enlightenment. Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah are often reconnecting with deeply significant traditions and customs, practiced not only by their ancestors, but by their immediate family which has yet to recognize Yeshua. Non-Jewish Believers called by God, into the Messianic movement, are embracing things which were practiced by Yeshua and His first followers. When the Biblical and Jewish holidays take place, these are supposed to be seasons of great personal, familial, and congregational unity and spiritual growth. As we reflect upon what the Lord has done in the past, we are to all embody the Psalmist's grand word, "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1, NRSV).

A majority of you who commemorate the Biblical and Jewish holidays experience precisely this: a sense of spiritual fulfillment and unity when they appear in the annual cycle. Yet, it would be entirely inappropriate to introduce you to the appointed times, without also letting you know that these can be periods of division and discord within the Messianic community. Many of you all already know this to be the case, if for any other reason because you have volunteered at your local Messianic congregation or fellowship to help, in some capacity, during the Fall high holidays or with the congregational Passover *seder*. You probably got a quick lesson in how it is one thing to remember the Biblical and Jewish holidays within the privacy of your own home; it is another thing to remember the Biblical and Jewish holidays in a much larger venue of people *who have opinions about the "right way" things are to be done*.

Unnecessary divisions and tensions are a part of human living, and whenever you have to help out, usually behind the scenes, with a large group of people remembering something important—it is inevitable that an incident of some kind will take place. This especially involves gatherings where large quantities of food have to be prepared and served, different people have been asked to cook the same item, but each has probably altered a recipe here or there to his or her liking. For a great number of you remembering the Biblical and Jewish holidays at a congregational level, the controversies you will encounter are likely to be involved with the logistical details of how a larger gathering of people can get the most out of them.

I wish all of the controversies involving the Biblical and Jewish holidays in today's Messianic movement solely concerned "the menu" of traditional foods and recipes offered at congregational gatherings. Most of the controversies involving the holidays actually tend to concern individual people investigating particular aspects or components of a season, either on their own or usually via some Internet source, which challenges a traditional Jewish understanding. While the Messianic Jewish movement, because of its affirmation of Yeshua as Israel's Messiah, has certainly challenged traditional views of the Synagogue—a wide array of traditional Jewish practices and customs are still observed. In our information age, though, it is very easy for those involved in a Messianic congregation to see the appointed times observed according to a philo-traditional model, but then have such a model either criticized or condemned, by encountering some online media. While not always offered by those within the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement—and sometimes even presented by evangelical Christians opposed to Messianic Judaism—those who tend to challenge Messianic Jewish employment of mainline Jewish traditions and approaches to the appointed times, are not too concerned with the Messianic movement's original vision of Jewish outreach, evangelism, and Israel solidarity.

Titus 3:9 does astutely communicate, "avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about Torah, for they are unprofitable and useless" (TLV). Yet at the same time, whether it be the weekly *Shabbat* service, or seasons such as the Fall high holidays or the Passover—the appointed times tend to be *the major periods* when one's local Messianic Jewish congregation is able to reach out to the Jewish community with the good news of Yeshua. You need to know what a number of the common controversies associated with the Biblical and Jewish holidays are, so when you encounter them, you can not only not be disturbed—but you can help stop potential problems before they start. Our list is by no means extensive, but will highlight some of the most common problems you are likely to witness.

The Sabbath Debate

Whether various leaders and teachers want to publicly admit it or not, the fact that today's Messianic movement holds its main worship services on Saturday, in observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as prescribed in the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15), immediately places it in conflict with most of the worldwide Body of Messiah.

An honest reading of the Gospels and Book of Acts will reveal that Yeshua the Messiah and His first followers, observed the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*—although Yeshua did come into conflict from time to time with

how various Jewish religious leaders and Pharisees applied various Sabbath regulations. As Yeshua poignantly asked, “Is it permitted on Shabbat to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to kill?” (Mark 3:4, TLV). The Sabbath keeping of Yeshua of Nazareth was one where it was permitted to perform the good deeds of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Messiah is indeed witnessed performing significant acts of healing and restoration to people on *Shabbat*. Later, it is said of a figure like the Apostle Paul, “As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2, 2011 NIV). Rather than abandon the institution of the Sabbath as a result of his Messiah faith, Paul used the weekly *Shabbat* service as a venue by which he could go to a Jewish synagogue, and declare Yeshua as Israel’s Messiah from the Tanach Scriptures.

While there are varied reasons given by modern evangelical Protestants, the most common claims issued for why the seventh-day Sabbath is not observed by most Christians any more are either: (1) The discovery of the empty tomb of Yeshua by Sunday morning necessitates a Divinely-approved transfer of the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day of the week, Sunday. Or, (2) the seventh-day Sabbath has been abolished for the post-resurrection era. Non-Jewish Believers in today’s Messianic movement, as well as many Messianic Jewish leaders trained in Protestant institutions, have been exposed enough to both of these points of view. More frequently than not, Christian people who are supportive of the Messianic movement as a means for Jewish evangelism, will come from a (dispensational) theological framework which approaches the seventh-day Sabbath as an institution which was only intended for Ancient Israel of the past, and not for the worldwide Body of Messiah in the present. Still, even though thinking that the seventh-day Sabbath was a thing of the past, such people will pragmatically recognize that Messianic congregations holding their services on Saturday is an appropriate way to attract Jewish non-Believers to the gospel—certainly in a way that a church which holds its services on Saturday will broadly be incapable of doing.

While it is doubtlessly true that Messianic congregations holding their services on Saturday should attract Jewish people who need to hear the good news of Israel’s Messiah—today’s Messianic community broadly does not think that the only reason why *Shabbat* is to be observed, is for matters of Jewish outreach. In the future Millennium, the seventh-day Sabbath is unambiguously to be enforced as a mandatory, worldwide observance (Isaiah 66:23), and today we are to largely represent such future realities in our present conduct, as we are able. *Shabbat* is a time to rest from our labors, commune with God and with one another, and to truly enter into a period of

intimacy and union with our Creator. And for many Messianic people, *Shabbat* truly is a time of physical rest and spiritual refreshment. Attending one's *Shabbat* service on Saturday becomes something that many Messianic people look forward to—not just because it is a significant time for worshipping the Lord and for studying the Scriptures—but often because it is the social highlight of the week, where we get to fellowship with fellow brothers and sisters in the Messiah.

Many Messianic people have learned how to carefully interact with Christian people who do not keep the seventh-day Sabbath. They recognize that the focus of our common faith is to be the atoning sacrifice of Yeshua of Nazareth, and rather than condemn those who disregard *Shabbat* or think it was changed to Sunday—they prefer to invite Christian friends and colleagues to their Messianic congregation on *Shabbat*, so they can see what makes the *Shabbat* experience much different than Sunday church. For many, the close community of a Messianic congregation, centered around its weekly service on Saturday, can do more to get people to see the value of *Shabbat* than any theological argument.

There are scores of Internet teachings out there which over-emphasize how the first day of the week was used in ancient paganism as a religious day—but most Protestants think that Sunday church originated much earlier, in the time of the Apostles (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). Yet, few are informed enough from either study of the Scripture or contemporary examinations, that it has been challenged as to whether or not some sporadic references to the “first of the week” seen in the Apostolic Writings (New Testament) are actually the beginnings of what would become “Sunday church.” What if various “first of the week” gatherings actually took place on Saturday evening, per ancient Jewish reckoning of time where the new day would begin in the evening—and such gatherings were more reminiscent of *havdallah* (הַבְּדִילָה), the ceremony that closes out the Sabbath?

While it is true that by the early-to-mid Second Century C.E., with the death of the Jewish apostles and their major successors, that the *ekklēsia* largely abandoned the seventh-day Sabbath in favor of Sunday activities—pockets of Christians over many centuries are witnessed to have observed the seventh-day Sabbath as a Creation institution (cf. Genesis 2:2-3). As the shackles of Catholicism were being thrown off, the issue of Sabbatarianism arose in the Protestant Reformation, although most Protestants believing in the continuance of a Sabbath-principle from the Fourth Commandment were actually seen to practice semi-Sabbatarianism—with the Sabbath believed to be changed from Saturday to Sunday. Still, various groups ranging from the Seventh-Day Baptists to the Seventh-Day Adventists have kept the discus-

sion of the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath alive and well in the world of theology. Various resources of note have been released over the past several decades, in favor of, and against, the continuance of the seventh-day Sabbath.¹

In our external relations, today's Messianic movement is going to have debates with others about the seventh-day Sabbath. And, there are certainly some significant discussions which have taken place in theological quarters about the ongoing importance of *Shabbat*. Yet for many of us, we see the Sabbath as a great gift given to people by our Creator, *a gift that far too many have dismissed or rejected*. So, in our keeping of *Shabbat*, let us be forever mindful of the famed admonition of Isaiah 58:13-14,

"If you turn back your foot from Shabbat, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call Shabbat a delight, the holy day of *ADONAI* honorable, if you honor it, not going your own ways, not seeking your own pleasure, nor speaking your usual speech, then You will delight yourself in *ADONAI*, and I will let you ride over the heights of the earth, I will feed you with the heritage of your father Jacob.' For the mouth of *ADONAI* has spoken" (TLV).

The Calendar Debate

One of the biggest controversies—which always tends to erupt at the most inconvenient time for Messianic congregational leaders and teachers— involves the Biblical calendar. The appointed times of the Torah are obviously observed on a different calendrical cycle than the Gregorian calendar used by secular society today. In the Creation account it is specified, "Let lights in the expanse of the sky be for separating the day from the night. They will be for signs and for seasons and for days and years" (Genesis 1:14, TLV). The common Hebrew word for month, *chodesh* (חֹדֶשׁ), also means "moon," a sure testament to the Hebrew calendar being lunar based.

During Second Temple times, the Jewish religious council known as the Sanhedrin would have been able to determine and agree when a new month had started, by the visible sighting of the New Moon. When the New Moon was sighted in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and the Sanhedrin could agree, then

¹ Two books that have widely framed the debate are Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), defending the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath from a Seventh-Day Adventist perspective, and D.A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999 [1982 actual publication]), cross-examining Bacchiocchi and defending Sunday as "the Lord's Day" from a broadly evangelical viewpoint.

A more recent analysis from a Seventh-Day Adventist standpoint is Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009). More general is Christopher John Donato, ed., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011).

signal fires were lit, and passed on over many hundreds of miles, signaling to the wider Jewish community that a new month had begun. This system was not exact, but it was what was employed until several centuries after the fall of Jerusalem. In 358 C.E., Rabbi Hillel II introduced a pre-calculated calendrical system for the worldwide Jewish community, now in a broad worldwide Diaspora. A pre-calculated calendar is what is employed by the mainstream Jewish community today.

For today's Messianic Jewish movement, the issue of what calendar to use for the Biblical holidays is a simple one; the Messianic Jewish movement uses the same calendar as the mainstream Jewish community. When the Jewish community meets for *Yom Kippur*, so does the Messianic Jewish community. If the Messianic Jewish movement uses a completely different calendar for the Biblical and Jewish holidays, how is it going to best fulfill its mandate of reaching out to Jewish people with the good news of Israel's Messiah? Attendance at Messianic Jewish congregations peaks during any of the holidays, after all!

While today's Messianic Jewish movement follows the pre-calculated calendar of the wider Jewish community, it is widely observed that the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement does not tend to follow the mainstream Jewish calendar. A number of fellowships and groups within the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement may be seen to follow the mainstream Jewish calendar, for most of the dates of the Biblical holidays, with a number of exceptions like following the Saddusaical rather than Pharisaical determination of counting the *omer* to *Shavuot*. The Saddusaical method of counting the *omer* reckons "the day after the sabbath" (Leviticus 23:11, NASU) to be the weekly Sabbath during the Festival of Unleavened Bread, whereas the Pharisaical method interprets the Sabbath here as being the High Sabbath of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. It is historically documented though that the Pharisaical method was followed in Second Temple times (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 3.250-251; Philo *Special Laws* 2.162), and it is what is observed in the Jewish community today.²

Unlike Messianic Judaism, the independent and mostly non-Jewish Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement will widely follow various calendars of its own invention. Some of these calendars will follow the determination of the New Moon as offered by the Karaite movement in Israel, a Jewish sect which rejects all forms of Rabbinical authority and the commentary of the Oral Torah. At the same time, other fellowships and groups are witnessed to formulate their own calendar on the basis of their own sighting of the New

² For a further evaluation of technical details, consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website, "Omer Count."

Moon, at a place outside of Jerusalem and the Land of Israel, which is usually where they meet. Further complications are witnessed when various groups' presumed "restored Biblical calendar" interjects speculations on the actual year since the Creation of the universe, but most especially prognostications about the time of the Messiah's return.

Ultimately, the issue involving the calendar followed by today's Messianics does concern our approach to Jewish tradition and the authority of the Rabbis. Many people are of the opinion that Jewish religious authorities which have rejected Yeshua of Nazareth, are to be rejected as having any legitimate things to say about any Biblical matters. Others, per Yeshua's words about the Pharisaical authorities sitting in the seat of Moses (Matthew 23:2-3), would conclude that the Jewish religious authorities should be followed in major matters such as what calendar should be followed for the Biblical holidays. Spiritual hypocrisy is actually what is to be dismissed (Matthew 23:4-35), not the dates on which the religious community remembers the Passover. For Messianic Jews, and non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic movement, following the mainstream Jewish calendar for all of the dates of the appointed times, is as much about Jewish outreach and evangelism, as it is about recognizing that the Jewish religious leaders do have an authority to not be easily disregarded. What kind of testimony is it to Jewish non-Believers, to not stand in solidarity with them during the appointed times—because a completely different calendar may be followed?³

Traditional Jewish Liturgy

There is little doubting the fact that liturgy is an important part of traditional Jewish worship, which the Messianic Jewish community is significantly affected by. Any Messianic Jewish service, on *Shabbat* or otherwise, is going to employ traditional and customary Jewish prayers and hymns. The significant majority of the liturgical prayers found in the *siddur* (סידור) are taken either directly from Tanach Scripture, or from the prayers and hymns offered up to God in the worship of the First and Second Temples.

While it might be said that in the Orthodox Jewish tradition, liturgy and traditional prayers make up the bulk of one's worship activities—a moderate amount of mixed Hebrew and English liturgy is what one tends to find in the Messianic Jewish community, concurrent with what is seen in Conservative or Reform Judaism. For many Messianic Jews, employing liturgy in congregational worship services is not just a vital part of being connected to one's Jewish heritage and the prayers issued to God from one's ancestors; it is

³ For a further discussion, consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website, "Biblical Calendar."

also a critical part of providing structure and reverence to corporate worship. Many non-Jewish Believers, from various Protestant backgrounds, greatly appreciate the value of liturgy, particularly in its ability to instill a sense of holiness.

Not everyone who comes into the Messianic movement likes liturgy. Some Messianic Jews, who were perhaps raised in Orthodox settings, would prefer that little or no traditional Hebrew liturgy be used by today's Messianic movement. Those from Pentecostal or charismatic backgrounds, are those who especially frown or oppose any usage of liturgy, as it is believed that only spontaneous forms of prayer are acceptable to God. Statements by Yeshua the Messiah, are typically invoked to dismiss any place for liturgy. Did He not say, "And when you are praying, do not babble on and on like the pagans; for they think they will be heard because of their many words" (Matthew 6:7, TLV)? Did He not also criticize the Pharisees of His day, in how they "make long prayers as a show" (Luke 20:47, TLV)? Frequently, there are those who conclude that liturgy only facilitates dead, rigid religion.

Yeshua the Messiah certainly opposed prayers which were repeated over and over by the religious leaders of His day, for the sole purpose of others observing them and being seemingly impressed by false, outward piety. However, how many of us in our spontaneous prayers to God, have ever been led to open our Bibles and read the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), or perhaps recite a Psalm? If you have ever done this, you have employed a liturgical style of worship.

Today's Messianic congregations should not unnecessarily bore people with endless Hebrew liturgy, where one's worship activities become stale and manufactured. At the same time, liturgical worship does have a place in one's remembrance of *Shabbat* and the appointed times. When employed properly, it is something that can be edifying, spiritually enlightening, and above all cause each of us to stand in awe of the holiness of Israel's God.

Extra-Torah and Extra-Biblical Jewish Remembrances

Within the annual cycle of the Messianic Jewish community, there are various holidays beyond those of the appointed times of Leviticus 23 which are observed. These holidays commemorate events which post-date the Exodus. Within Holy Scripture, *Purim* commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people from the schemes of Haman to annihilate them. Mordechai saw to it that an annual remembrance be founded (Esther 9:20-22). Messianic Jewish Believers and most non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic movement recognize that without the deliverance of *Purim*, there would have

been no Jewish people into which the Messiah Yeshua would be born. They recognize the value of *Purim*, although from time to time one will find people in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement who (significantly) frown on it. It is their opinion that commemorating historical events in the life of Israel, subsequent to the giving of the Torah, is “adding” to the commandments.

Chanukah, or the Feast of Dedication, is an extra-Biblical holiday commemorating the defeat of the Syrian Greeks and cleansing of the Temple (1 Maccabees 4:59). In the Jewish community today, *Chanukah* is remembered for eight days, where families and synagogues light the *menorah*, eat traditional foods such as potato latkes, and give gifts to one another. In Biblical Studies, the events surrounding the Second Century B.C.E. Maccabean crisis are imperative to understanding some of the complicated relations between Jews, Greeks, and Romans in the time of Yeshua and His early followers. The Jewish people faced forced assimilation into Hellenistic paganism, and rightly resisted. Today’s Messianic Jewish community appropriately celebrates *Chanukah*, as did Israel’s Messiah (John 10:22). People in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement will, at times, be found dismissive of *Chanukah*, thinking that its remembrance is in violation of the Torah—when the celebration of *Chanukah* is technically similar to American Independence Day or any holiday remembering an important victory over evil.

Your Further Education in the Appointed Times

Whether you are a Jewish Believer in Yeshua, who is reconnecting with his or her heritage as a result of your Messiah faith, or a non-Jewish Believer first connecting with his or her Hebrew and Jewish Roots—every year the appointed times are remembered, is going to be a year of learning something new and important. This might involve further Bible studies, a greater appreciation for ancient histories, or admiring various Jewish traditions and customs. The appointed times possess a significant Messianic substance to them (Colossians 2:17), and as such we should learn more about the salvation history work of Yeshua when we observe them. Given the fact that we are all limited human beings on a steady path toward greater spiritual maturity, we also have the responsibility to learn to act and behave more like Yeshua, and focus on “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable” (Philippians 4:8, TLV).



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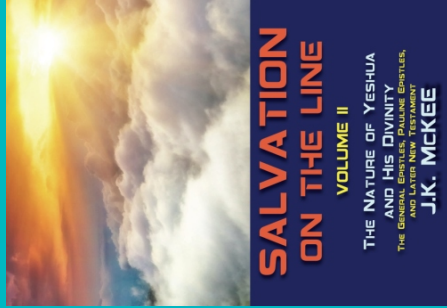


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